10 September 2007

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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2007

Draft report

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

A. Matters related to and intersessional departures from the approved calendar for 2007

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 61/236 of 22 December 2006, approved the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2007 as submitted by the Committee on Conferences[1] and authorized the Committee to make any adjustments that might become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the Assembly at its sixty-first session. The finalized calendar was issued as document A/AC.172/2007/2.

2. At its 373rd meeting, on 26 August 1994, the Committee had decided that, in future, requests for intersessional departures submitted to the Committee should be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action.

3. At its 379th meeting, on 23 March 1995, the Committee had agreed that proposed changes to the calendar that did not have programme budget implications could be dealt with by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee.

4. At its substantive session of 1995, the Committee had decided that requests for intersessional departures submitted to the Committee that involved a change of venue should be referred to the members for approval. Departures that involved other types of changes, as decided upon by the Committee at its substantive session of 1994, should be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action.

5. Requests submitted in 2007 for changes of venue or additional sessions/meetings and the action taken by the Committee are set out below.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/61/32), annex II.

Organ	*Request*	*Action taken*
Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf	To convene four additional meetings on 11 and 13 September 2007 in order to avoid ambiguity during technical deliberations on several key issues pertaining to the Commission's programme of work. Conference services to be provided on "as available" basis.	Request approved
Fifth Committee	To extend the second part of its resumed session by one week to 8 June 2007. Exact dates were arranged in consultation with conference services to enable servicing those meetings within existing resources.	Request approved
Ninth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names	To convene one additional meeting on 31 August 2007 in order to conclude its work. Conference services were to be used from those allocated to the Group of Experts on Geographical Names comprised of the same delegates and scheduled to meet with confirmed services on that day. (However, the services requested were not required since the Conference completed the work of the ninth session within the allocated time.)	Request approved
UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board	To hold one formal meeting on 11 January 2007 in order to elect its new Bureau. Conference services provided within existing resources.	Request approved

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III. Meetings management/improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

A. Matters related to and intersessional departures from the approved calendar for 2007

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 61/236 of 22 December 2006, approved the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2007 as submitted by the Committee on Conferences[1] and authorized the Committee to make any adjustments that might become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the Assembly at its sixty-first session. The finalized calendar was issued as document A/AC.172/2007/2.

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UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board	To hold one formal meeting on 11 January 2007 in order to elect its new Bureau. Conference services provided within existing resources.	Request approved

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

II. Meetings management/improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

B. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with/letters to bodies concerning utilization of conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 484th meeting, on 10 September, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences containing statistical data and analysis of the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2006 (A/62/161 and Corr.1, paras. 23-34 and annex I). The overall utilization factor at the four duty stations had decreased from 85 per cent in 2005 to 83 per cent in 2006, reaching the same level as reported in 2004. The number of cancelled meetings with interpretation had declined, however, as well as the overall time lost due to late starts and early adjournments, as a result of improved advance planning and coordination with secretariats. The overall utilization factor had remained above the established benchmark of 80 per cent.

2. The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chairperson on his consultations with five intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the applicable benchmark percentage of their allocated resources, with the goal of striking a balance between the efficient substantive work of those bodies while rationalizing their use of conference-servicing resources. There had been positive developments as a result of targeted meetings with bodies that had not used all their resources, including an increased awareness that they should not take their entitlements for granted and a genuine desire to make the best possible use of the conference services provided.

07-50355 (E)

3. Solutions suggested during those consultations included improving accuracy at the planning stage in forecasting the number of meetings requiring interpretation; opening meetings on time, including waiver of the quorum rule; suggesting discussion of other items or holding informal consultations with interpretation if time remained; avoiding the unpredictable cancellation of meetings; maximizing the option of scheduling informal consultations with interpretation services; and scheduling shorter meetings if it is anticipated that interpretation services will not be needed for the full duration of the meeting.

4. Three intergovernmental bodies that had previously underutilized conference-servicing resources had reached or surpassed the established benchmark of 80 per cent in 2006 as a result of careful planning and ongoing dialogue with conference services. Two major factors directly linked to decreased utilization were meeting cancellations and time lost owing to late starts and early endings. Accordingly, the Chairperson proposed three options to improve efficiency, namely, writing a short letter on behalf of the Committee to the chairpersons of all committees requesting them to pay greater attention to avoiding late starts and early endings, reflecting that phenomenon in the draft resolution and requesting members to discuss those factors with their regional groups and States.

5. The Chairperson suggested that the most effective way to improve the utilization of conference services was a three-pronged approach. The Committee on Conferences and its Chairperson, acting on its behalf, should conduct consultations with chairpersons, particularly incoming chairpersons, to inform them of the relevant guidelines and recommendations concerning the use of conference-servicing resources; the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management should continue its proactive approach with "underutilizers" at the planning stage; and intergovernmental bodies should improve their planning and organization of work by being more realistic in their requests for conference services.

Discussion

6. The view was expressed that a balanced approach must be taken, bearing in mind the prerogatives of intergovernmental bodies regarding methods of work, rules of procedure and scheduling of sessions. The intensive consultations between the Chairperson and the secretariats of underutilizers had yielded good results and should continue.

7. In response to a request for clarification on how the utilization factor was calculated, a representative of the Secretariat explained that early endings of meetings posed less of a problem than late starts. At the initial planning stage, all meetings were assumed to be three hours long, but with advance notice, if a meeting was expected to be shorter, the utilization factor could be adjusted accordingly. In the same way, if the remaining time was used for informal consultations with interpretation, for instance, the utilization factor would not be affected.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

III. Meetings management/improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

C. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

Introduction and overview

1. At its 484th meeting, on 10 September, the Committee on Conferences considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/62/161, paras. 35-41). The percentage of such meetings provided with interpretation had fallen from 87 per cent in 2005 to 77 per cent in 2006 because more meetings had been requested and because calendar bodies' better utilization of conference services had resulted in fewer cancellations and therefore less residual availability. In the previous year, acting on the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/236, the Secretariat had identified two options to overcome the problem. The first, to earmark specific resources to make conference servicing for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States more predictable, had not been pursued. The second, a "piggyback" plan whereby the Department in New York allocated specific services on a weekly basis, had been put into effect as from 1 January 2007. While that option seemed to have had a positive effect, it was unlikely to offer a permanent solution. In the absence of a mandate from the Assembly earmarking specific resources to service such meetings, the Department could see no further innovative or cost-free options to satisfy requests for services from regional and other major groupings of Member States.

07-50343 (E)

Discussion

2. The Committee expressed concern that, as time went on, increasing requests for meetings and more successful efforts to use conference services efficiently would leave less and less capacity to reallocate to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States. Some delegations wondered whether all possible approaches had been explored and whether enough effort was being devoted to finding long-term rather than ad hoc solutions. The "piggyback" option only succeeded if financial resources remained in step with the increasing demand for conference services. If resources were cut off at an arbitrary level, breaking that dynamic, the operation of the intergovernmental bodies would suffer doubly from a lack of conference services and from a lack of essential input from regional and other major groupings of Member States.

3. In answer to a request for an assessment of the resources which would need to be earmarked to service meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, should the mandate be amended and such an option be envisaged, the representative of the Secretariat said that just such an assessment had been made in the form of an estimate of programme budget implications provided several years previously (A/58/397). However, that option had not been pursued by Member States. The services continued, therefore, to be dependant on cancellations, which were unpredictable, and had no other solutions to offer. It was for the Committee to decide if it wished to rely upon the "piggyback" approach in the long term or to explore other methods.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

III. Meetings management/improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

D. Improved utilization of conference facilities at Nairobi

1. At its 484th meeting, on 10 September 2007, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning the utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/62/161 and Corr.1, paras. 42 and 43). The United Nations Office at Nairobi had confirmed that all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies in 2006 had been held there in Nairobi.

E. Improved utilization of the Conference Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

2. Also at its 484th meeting, on 10 September, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning the utilization of the Conference Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (A/62/161 and Corr.1, paras. 44-48).

Introduction and overview

3. The Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management had recently visited the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and reported that the situation regarding the use of the Conference Centre had continued to improve, due in large part to increased marketing efforts by ECA. In addition, the method of calculating the utilization rate had been corrected. The Commission was cooperating closely with the Department of Safety and Security regarding security standards in approving meetings to be held there. He also reported increased

cooperation between ECA and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which had taken the form of the loan of a staff member working in information technology from Addis Ababa to Nairobi and advice from Nairobi in enhancing the conference services in Addis Ababa.

Discussion

4. Satisfaction was expressed at the significant improvement in the utilization rate of the Conference Centre at ECA and the concrete results of closer collaboration between ECA and the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The efforts of ECA to improve the quality of conference services were commendable.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

IV. Impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach)

Introduction and overview

1. At its 484th and 485th meetings, on 10 September, the Committee on Conferences considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach) (see A/62/161, paras. 49-51). As the document chain was complex and highly integrated and General Assembly mandates regarding documentation unyielding, it had been decided that the best course of action was to keep the operation intact by relocating all language staff, including translation services, editors and text-processing units, to the temporary swing space located at 305 East 46th Street for the duration of the implementation of the capital master plan. In addition, a portion of staff from the Executive Office and the Information Management and Technology Unit would be at the swing space location for administrative and technical support. The timing of the move was currently planned for the third quarter of 2008, but could be postponed until the first quarter of 2009, after the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, if delays in implementation of the plan warranted it. The goal was to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of documentation in all six official languages, according to the principle of equal treatment of all languages. To that end, a working group comprising focal points from every functional group had been formed. The next phase of planning would involve focal points from each individual unit slated to move.

2. A representative of the Capital Master Plan Office reported that the design phase of the project was moving forward while the owner of the rental space performed demolition and cleanup. Once that work was completed, construction of

07-50478 (E)

the new office space would begin. The projected duration of occupation of the space would continue through 2013, although that date was still tentative.

Discussion

3. Satisfaction was expressed that the planning for the move of language staff to the swing space would ensure a seamless transition that would not adversely impact the provision of documentation. In response to questions regarding the logistics of moving some 750 staff members, the representative of the Capital Master Plan Office said that a relocation project management firm is being engaged to coordinate the details. Staff would move sequentially by groups, usually over a weekend, in accordance with the workflow and the limitations on volume imposed by the capacity of elevators in the new space. The construction manager, appointed 30 July, is working on developing an updated schedule. The next annual report of the Secretary-General, to be issued in the near future, would contain updated information for the project.

4. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management would be operating from four different locations for the duration of the project: the swing space, the temporary conference building, the basement and second floor of the existing conference building and at 2 United Nations Plaza. Concerns were therefore expressed about maintaining the necessary level of information technology infrastructure in all those locations, which would be addressed in some measure by the addition of two P-3 information technology posts.

5. Replying to questions regarding expenses for the swing space covered under the capital master plan budget, the representative of the Capital Master Plan Office said that one-time costs, such as the cost of disconnecting and reconnecting existing computers and other equipment, and up to $500,000 for the purchase of new furniture had been included, although most of the existing furnishings would be re-used unless a cost-benefit analysis indicated that purchasing new furniture and equipment would be more cost-effective. The costs of the relocation project management firm were also included.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

V. Integrated global management/results of the work of the task forces and follow-up on their recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. At its 485th meeting on 10 September the Committee on Conferences considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning integrated global management (A/62/161, paras. 5-11). The two-year project aimed at harmonizing the administrative policies, practices and procedures of conference services in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi had led to the adoption in 2006 of a compendium of administrative policies, practices and procedures. The compendium reflected the agreements reached by the task forces of the two-year project as well as those reached at the 2006 Coordination Meeting of Conference Managers, including, in particular, proactive document management and waiver management, as well as a common roster for outside contractors. The compendium had been made available to Member States for information purposes. A workshop of programme and information technology staff from all four duty stations in March 2007 had made progress on the three projects under the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management global information technology initiative (centrally hosted reporting database; more integrated meetings management system; standardization of documents management systems), which would run until 2009. The Department had been advised to evaluate the customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise content management (ECM) applications being introduced, with considerable delays, throughout the Secretariat, to determine their suitability for its meetings planning and servicing project and documents planning and processing project.

2. During the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, a client survey on conference services distributed to representatives of the Member States had collected data on the performance indicators identified in the strategic framework

for the 2006/07 period. While services had been rated excellent or good by 86 per cent, satisfactory by 13 per cent and poor by under 2 per cent of the respondents, the overall response rate, despite the availability of the survey in six languages, had been about 13 per cent. The Department had sought the advice of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on ways to improve the survey, which had been conducted every year since the fifty-ninth session. The Office had suggested changes to the survey form, but also other ways to increase feedback, particularly a central database to capture and analyse communications from committee chairpersons, Member States and other conference services clients. The informational meetings for Member States, which had begun in 2002, were now held in a number of duty stations, and attended by the chiefs of language services and by representatives of the Department of Public Information, which was responsible for the Organization's website and press releases. It had been suggested that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management should issue a brochure outlining its mandates, working methods and outputs, and that each permanent mission should have a focal point for translation and interpretation issues.

Discussion

3. Several delegations urged the Department not to lose sight of the goal of integrated global management, which was to improve efficiency and quality and to harmonize practices and procedures across the four duty stations. Any changes in working methods must take account of the uniqueness of the language services and respect the principles of equality of duty stations and official languages.

4. Responding to requests for clarification, representatives of the Secretariat said that the status of the compendium of administrative policies, practices and procedures was reflected in its name. It described the administrative aspects of the work of the Department as distinct from the mandates received from the General Assembly. The Department had made a conscious effort to ensure that the compendium was in line with legislative mandates by referring it to the Secretariat's Office of Legal Affairs. The fact that it would be updated in the future should not be taken to mean that it was a draft document awaiting finalization. It just reflected the fact that the process of harmonization was not finished. In addition, conditions evolved and that was why the compendium had to be seen as a work in progress.

5. The principles determining the division of labour among duty stations were not laid down in specific instructions, but instead determined by what was practical or by existing requirements such as the headquarters rule. With regard to collaboration on recruitment, the proposal for a common roster for outside contractors involved consolidating and rationalizing the currently independent lists of individual service providers maintained by each duty station. By contrast, companies providing services to the Department could not simply be placed on a roster, but must follow the Organization's usual procurement process, which involved competitive bidding. A distinction remained between outside contractors and freelance staff working off-site as an alternative to working in-house. The competitive examinations for new language staff were outdated in some respects, so the Department, working with the Office of Human Resources Management, was endeavouring to make them more flexible, while keeping all candidates on an equal footing.

6. The Assistant Secretary-General explained that the global information technology initiative could not progress properly if the large amounts of data existing in each duty station were not directly comparable and compatible. The common code structure needed for the proposed global reporting data warehouse was expected to advance further later in 2007. The Department would work with the Secretariat's Information Technology Services Division, which was represented on the Department's global information technology board, and the recently appointed Chief Information Technology Officer to ensure the compatibility of the Department's stand-alone documents and meeting management systems with the enterprise resource planning system proposed for the entire Organization.

7. Although representatives of the Secretariat had expressed disappointment at the continuing low rate of participation both in the surveys and in the informational meetings, several delegations were of the view that they remained a useful tool for providing feedback and facilitating dialogue. The Committee also welcomed the suggestion that feedback from Member States could also be channelled through the Department's newly-appointed Communications Officer.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

VI. Translation- and interpretation-related matters

Introduction and overview

1. At its 486th and 487th meetings, on 12 September, the Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, section VI, concerning translation- and interpretation-related matters (see A/62/161, paras. 84-86, Performance measurement and management; paras. 87-89, Self-revision; paras. 90-92, Contractual translation and quality control; paras. 93-98, Succession plans for language staff; and paras. 99 and 100, Impact of freelance recruitment on quality of interpretation at all duty stations).

2. Representatives of conference services at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi participated via videoconference in the 486th meeting of the Committee and discussed the theme of training and mobility, and their implications for the quality of conference services.

Geneva

3. The Director of the Conference Services Division in Geneva reiterated the importance of increasing the resources which the Organization devotes to training. In the particular case of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, which had embarked on a process of reform to improve the quality, quantity, timeliness and cost-effectiveness of its services, the scarcity of training risked undermining quality. The departure of the 30 per cent of the staff of the Conference Services Division in Geneva who were due to retire in the coming six years would leave a gap in knowledge, skills and experience that must be filled through training and mobility. The ongoing information technology harmonization would play a vital role by ensuring that wherever staff moved, they would be using identical or similar systems and therefore reach optimum productivity faster. On mobility, the Committee on Conferences could help by recognizing the special

characteristics of language staff and paving the way for special mobility provisions for them.

Nairobi

4. The Chief of the Division of Conference Services in Nairobi expressed full support for the Department's continuous learning policies and requests for resources, which would maintain quality and facilitate the intergovernmental process. For various reasons, Nairobi had problems attracting and retaining language staff. To halt the continuous turnover, efforts must be made to make the duty station more attractive. Training efforts could help and had already been exploited to bring up to standard some examination candidates who had narrowly missed achieving the required results on their first attempt. Mobility could also help; perhaps staff who agreed to serve in Nairobi could be assured a transfer elsewhere after a time.

Vienna

5. The Chief of Conference Management Services in Vienna said that mobility and training were important elements of a learning culture that promoted continuous training and development. While there was room for future debate on whether uniform or differentiated training and individual or group training was most efficient or cost-effective, he said that he wished to focus on mobility and its relevance to Vienna, which was a small duty station with its own characteristics. The staff of the Conference Management Services there had been highly mobile, through lateral moves, promotions, temporary assignments and transfers to other duty stations. However, mobility and career development suffered because comparable functions in New York and Geneva carried higher grades than in Vienna. In order to address the problem, which had been highlighted as integrated global management efforts progressed, in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 the Secretary-General proposed six senior interpreter positions and the abolition of five P-3 posts in the Translation Service in favour of P-4 posts. However, remaining obstacles consist of a lack of senior revisers in the translation sections and the practice of recruiting candidates from competitive examination rosters at only the P-2 and P-3 levels rather than also at the P-4 level, thus demotivating those with considerable experience.

New York

6. The Director of the Documentation Division in New York believed that while there was recognition of the importance of training for United Nations staff, this had not as yet been followed up by any increase in funding for training. The Department had long enjoyed a culture of continuous learning, recognizing the value of keeping knowledge, including staff members' mastery of developments in their mother tongues, up to date. The newly appointed departmental Training Coordination Officer, in his dialogue with all the language services, had confirmed that training was pivotal to the objectives of the Department and to the maintenance of skills, career development and staff morale. However, as conference service staff were part of a chain of production, withdrawing them from their functions to undergo training created a need for temporary assistance, which in the Department was properly termed temporary assistance for meetings as distinct from the Secretariat-wide general temporary assistance. Marking a new approach, a comprehensive

departmental training plan, with appropriate costings, was under preparation. This would be submitted to the Office for Human Resources Management, which controlled training resources.

Discussion

Geneva

7. In response to comments regarding requests for resources, the representative of the Conference Services Division in Geneva said that adequate resources were needed to satisfy the new demands for meeting and document services. It was vital for the Department to evolve a common approach to coping with the workload implications for the Division of decision 5/1 of the Human Rights Council on institution-building of the United Nations Human Rights Council and of the proposed revisions to the biennial programme plans and priorities for the period 2006-2007 (A/61/125).

Nairobi

8. The Chief of the Division of Conference Services said that his duty station had benefited from the Department's integrated global management project, especially through the assistance with information technology issues that was provided from New York and Vienna. However, as in the case of Vienna, there was a mismatch between functions and grade levels in Nairobi compared with Geneva and New York. The United Nations Office at Nairobi had limited control over the availability of conference-servicing resources, 50 per cent of which came from extrabudgetary funds under charge-back arrangements with the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

9. Representatives of the Secretariat said that the roster of successful candidates from the competitive examination for Arabic interpreters held in April 2007 was expected to be ready in September 2007 and might yield recruits for Nairobi as a long-term solution to the persistent vacancy problem that had been discussed at length in the Committee. A shorter term solution, covering approximately one year, had been found in the form of temporary staff. The chief of the Arabic Interpretation Service in New York had also tested the skills of freelance interpreters interested in working in Nairobi. It must be borne in mind that the vacancy rates in Nairobi for interpreters of some other languages were no better than for Arabic and that in any event interpreters in that duty station were sometimes idle because their workload varied. This resulted in an overall utilization rate of 50 per cent and to staff being loaned to other duty stations, a practice which raised the utilization rate to no more than 55 per cent.

New York

10. The delegations of the German-speaking States that provided extrabudgetary resources to fund the German Translation Section at Headquarters emphasized the valuable work performed by the staff concerned.

Vienna

11. In response to concerns expressed by delegations regarding problems with the inconsistent quality of freelance interpretation services and the inadequate revision

capacity to check the quality of contractual translation, the Chief of the Conference Management Service indicated that the issues affecting interpretation and translation both stemmed from the duty station's distinct development in the days before the integrated global management project. Member States rightly demanded the same level of quality in conference services in Vienna as they did elsewhere, yet staff in Vienna performed the same functions as elsewhere at lower grade levels.

12. While the number of interpreter posts requested in the budget for the next biennium fell far short of a full interpretation team, those posts would reduce to approximately 30 per cent the current 50 per cent reliance on freelance interpreters to provide services not only to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other Secretariat bodies, but also to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

13. In the translation sections, by contrast, reliance on outside personnel working under contractual or off-site arrangements, with the necessary information technology support, was being increased substantially, creating a need for more systematic quality control and therefore for the recruitment of senior revisers at the P-5 level. If resources for such staff were denied, the only available solutions were not ideal: obliging staff at the P-4 level to perform functions outside their job descriptions; recruiting retired revisers on short-term contracts; or sharing the workload with other duty stations.

General discussion

14. Several delegations stated that they attached great importance to the principle of equal treatment of language staff. A number of discrepancies were noted in the conditions of recruitment of short-term language staff between certain languages and duty stations; it was unclear why some short-term staff were recruited as local regardless of their actual domicile. A representative of the Secretariat said that many factors entered into the use of temporary assistance, including the level of permanent staffing and the actual workload for a language or duty station and the availability of freelance staff on the local market, and that a difference in spending levels should not be perceived as discrimination. In addition, the declaration of domicile chosen by the temporary staff member must be respected. The specific case of discrepancies in grade for the chiefs of the Chinese and Russian copy preparation and proofreading sections needs to be addressed.

15. Concern was expressed at the demographic change that would be affecting the language services as a whole in the near future with the expected retirement of nearly 20 per cent of language staff within five years. There was a need for succession planning to ensure that the resulting vacancies would be filled in a timely manner and that experienced senior revisers would be available to train new staff. General proposals to deal with the situation included raising the mandatory retirement age and removing the ceiling on the earnings of retirees set by the General Assembly as a temporary measure during the period of the demographic shift. Outreach to colleges, universities and schools of translation and interpretation regarding language careers in the United Nations and other international organizations had resulted in contacts in the United States of America, Spain, Argentina, China and the Middle East, and those efforts would be pursued and expanded.

16. Some frustration was expressed at the long delays in recruitment of successful candidates from competitive examinations, sometimes as long as two years. A representative of the Secretariat agreed that the process was lengthy and labour-intensive, but was considered to be worth the effort because the goal was the recruitment of career professionals. Some of the delays occurred in the Office of Human Resources Management, which conducted a thorough and careful verification of the credentials of each successful candidate, although the process could be streamlined. In reply to questions regarding the use of targeted examinations to fill chronic vacancies in certain duty stations, he said that the Office of Human Resources Management was reluctant to authorize such a departure from established policy because of potential legal implications, although it had not completely ruled out the possibility. Such examinations would also limit the pool of candidates, risking a lowering of standards. It was agreed that a step-by-step approach was the best way to move towards a solution to those problems.

17. Quality control, especially of contractual translation, was another matter of great importance to delegations and to the Department, which had requested seven additional P-5 posts at Headquarters to meet a need that was expected to grow with the increasing use of translation companies. Satisfaction was expressed that regular meetings were being held between the translation and interpretation services for the coordination of terminology and the development of electronic glossaries. As part of integrated global management, a Terminology Coordination Board had been established for the harmonization of terminology used in the four main duty stations and the regional commissions.

18. In reply to questions regarding the application of the new performance measurement methodology, a representative of the Secretariat said that the workload standards previously used had proven to be one-dimensional, and if they were taken as the only measure of success, other targets, such as quality, could be missed. The methodology, which drew inspiration from the "balanced scorecard" for performance measurement, took into account a broad array of factors, including such areas as staff satisfaction.

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Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

VII. Documentation and publication-related matters

Introduction and overview

1. At its 485th and 487th meetings, on 10 and 12 September, the Committee on Conferences considered the section on document management of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (see A/62/161, paras. 52-83 and annex IV). The senior management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management was closely involved in document management through regular communication with department heads and presiding officers on the status of pre-session documentation. Presiding officers were informed whenever late submission of a document was approved, with the goal of full transparency on when the report would be available. Author departments received regular reminders of submission deadlines, and a model timeline had been developed for their use as a means of sharing best practices in the preparation of reports.

2. As part of the accountability mechanism requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/236, monthly internal reports on documents management statistics were used to produce a more detailed bimonthly documents management report covering all aspects of the document chain, which was presented to the Departmental Management Group and often served as an early warning of submission problems. In addition, the interdepartmental task force met several times a year to consider any issues related to document production. To institutionalize the accountability mechanism, a proposal was made to establish a separate unit for monitoring, evaluation, statistics, risk assessment and change management functions in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009.

3. Updated figures for the timely submission of documentation as at 31 August 2007 showed that 66 per cent of documents had been submitted on time and that the average delay was 18 days, up from 15 days in 2006. Thus far in 2007, 60 per cent of documents had been issued in compliance with the six-week rule, compared with

53 per cent in 2006; the percentage of documents issued within four weeks was 75 per cent, compared with 78 per cent in 2006.

Discussion

4. The Committee reaffirmed the importance of timely submission and issuance of documentation, which had a direct effect on the efficiency of the work of United Nations bodies, while expressing appreciation for the efforts of the Secretariat to improve the situation. Appreciation was expressed also for the online course on writing reports that had been developed in Vienna. Delegations also attached importance to the timely publication of documents on the United Nations website, while observing the practice of simultaneous distribution in all official languages. When asked if additional resources were needed to improve the timely issuance of documentation, a representative of the Secretariat said that the capacity planning process, by enabling the Department to adjust to variations in supply and demand, allowed it to work within existing resources.

5. The report of the Committee on Conferences itself was given as an example of a case of force majeure. The Fifth Committee would meet to consider the report only three weeks after the end of the substantive session of the Committee, thus making it impossible to apply the six-week rule to its issuance. Other examples included reports of the Secretary-General that included the outcome of other intergovernmental bodies, such as the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which would take place at the end of September 2007.

6. While some delegations expressed support for the proposals made by the Secretary-General in paragraph 77 of his report, others were of the view that those proposals would not expedite the processing of reports. With regard to the proposal in paragraph 77 (c), in particular, it was felt that each body should deal with submissions from Member States on an individual basis, and further, that many General Assembly resolutions mandated the publication of such submissions in all official languages.

7. Although no major improvement in the timely issuance of documentation could be reported, a representative of the Secretariat said that the summary record backlog had been cleared through 2002. Through integrated global management of conference services, contractual translation capacity at Headquarters had been used to process some of the summary records originating at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

A. Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

1. At its 484th meeting, on 10 September, the Committee on Conferences considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning requests from subsidiary bodies to meet during the regular session of the General Assembly (see A/62/161, chap. IV, sect. A, and annex III) in connection with three additional requests and explanations of reasons from subsidiary bodies that were transmitted subsequently for exceptions to be made to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243, by which the Assembly had decided that no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly might meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

Conclusions and recommendations

2. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly explicitly authorize the following bodies to meet in New York during the main part of its sixty-second session, on the understanding that all such meetings would be allocated conference services on an "as available" basis in such a way that the work of the Assembly and its main committees would not be impeded:**

(a) **Administrative Tribunal;**

(b) **Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;**

(c) **Committee on Relations with the Host Country;**

(d) **Disarmament Commission;**

(e) **Executive Board of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women;**

(f) **Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;**

(g) **Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories;**

(h) **Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.**

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

B. Adoption of the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2008-2009

Introduction and overview

1. At its 484th meeting, on 10 September, the Committee on Conferences reviewed the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2008-2009 (see A/62/161/Add.1 and Corr.1).

Consideration of the draft provisional calendar of conferences and meetings for 2008 and 2009 in the economic, social and related fields

2. At its 482nd meeting, on 11 July, and at its 483rd meeting, on 20 July, the Committee had considered the draft provisional calendar of conferences and meetings for 2008 and 2009 in the economic, social and related fields (E/2007/L.10) and had submitted its observations to the Council accordingly.

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